

## “Source Analysis & Historical Fencing”

Slides for Interview, Razmafzar TV

27 February 2024

JBT Emmons



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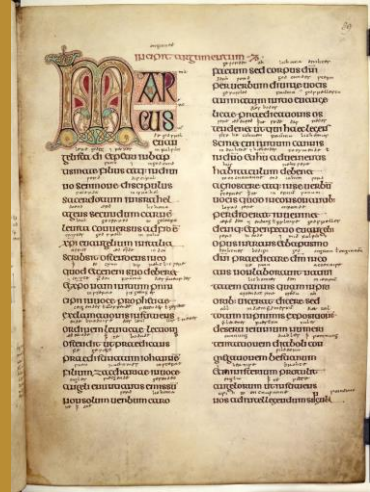
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# WHAT IS A “SOURCE?”

- written testimony from a particular time and culture
- primary vs. secondary [*history*]
- artistic depictions [*art history/archaeology*]
- cultural artifacts and features [*archaeology*]
  - artifact → an extant weapon
  - feature → mass graves such as Visby, Towton, Turin, etc.
  - forensic → human remains showing combat trauma



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# HISTORICAL FENCING = SOURCES

- The Walpurgis Ms. I 33 (ca. 1310-1325 CE)
- Medieval Manuscripts
  - Works on fighting (ex. *Fior di Battaglia*, “Die Zettel”)
  - Works that mention fighting (ex. histories, chronicles, etc.)
- Revolution in Printing (ca. 1450 ff) → *more sources*
  - e.g. 16-17<sup>th</sup> century “rapier” works
  - 17-18<sup>th</sup> century smallsword treatises
  - 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries military tracts
- OTHER EVIDENCE
  - art
  - artifacts



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**THE ART OF THE DUELING SABRE**  
A TRANSLATION AND EXPLANATION OF CAV. SETTIMO DEL FRATE'S AWARD-WINNING TEXTBOOK ON GIUSEPPE RADAELLI'S SABRE METHOD FOR THE FENCING MASTERS SCHOOL OF MILANO

NOW SUPPLEMENTED WITH THE MODERN PRACTICE OF RADAELLIAN SABRE  
A PRACTICE FROM A LIVING TRADITION COMPLETE WITH DRILLS, LESSONS, AND A SYNOPSIS TABLE OF ACTIONS

BY MONITEUR D'ESCRIME CHRISTOPHER A. HOLZMAN

*Théorie pratique de l'Épée,*  
droite sur la poignée & de-là on relevera les deux bras par-dessus la tête, ensuite on les dépliétera en croix en baissant les épaules.  
De cette première position, on couvrira les genoux, ensuite on portera le pied droit à une femelle & demi de distance, & en ligne transversale au talon gauche; le bras droit un peu plus en-dehors qu'en-dehors; le poignet du gauche un peu arrondi, & le pouce près du doigt index.  
La tenue du fleuret sera d'avoir le pouce à plus sur le corps de la poignée, le doigt index deffous, & plus avancé que les trois autres.  
*Premier tens de la main pour le coup de Quatre.*  
La première démonstration sera de tourner les ongles en-dehors, ensuite on élèvera la main; & à son élévation, le bras gauche baillera, ainsi que les épaules.

Classic History  
**CHRONICLES**  
Froissart  
Translated and Edited by John Jolliffe

Figure 4. Skeleton 92: impressive triangular lesion on the left frontal and parietal bones (a); slight reparative process in the form of fine porosity along the margins of the cut (b); regular straight sulcus along the interior margin of the lesion, probably the result of cleaning surgical intervention (c). This figure is available in colour online at [www.oxfordjournals.org/abstract/doi/10.1093/ajph/aqz001](http://www.oxfordjournals.org/abstract/doi/10.1093/ajph/aqz001).

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# CHALLENGES

**Technical**

- Orthography
- Language
- Transcription
- Translation [text AND image]
- **Damage** and/or **incomplete documents**

**Contextual**

- Historical Context
- Cultural Context
- Literary Context
- Purpose of the Author
- Reception of work (if known)
- Legacy (if the work was influential)

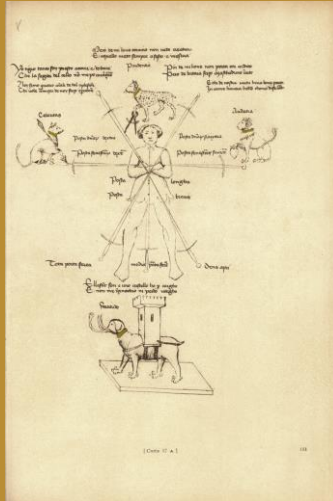
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# TECHNICAL CHALLENGES



Ms Latin I 1269 01 v, "Florius" or  
"The Paris"



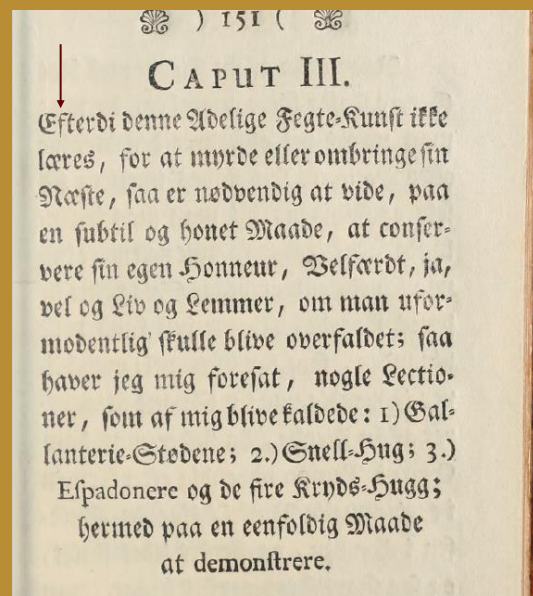
Pisani-Dossi MS 17a



Ms Ludwig XV 13 32r

7

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*Efterdi denne Adelige Fegte-Kunst ikke læres, for at myrde eller ombringe sin Næste, saa er nødvendig at vide, paa en subtil og honet Maade, at conserbere sin egen Honneur, Velfærdt, ja, vel og Liv og Lemmer, om man uføromodentlig skulde blive overfaldet; saa haver jeg mig foresat, nogle Lectioner, som af mig blive kaldede: 1) Gallanterie-Stødene; 2) Snell-hug; 3) Espadonere og de fire Kryds-Hugg; hermed paa en eenfoldig Maade at demonstrere.*

Seeing that this noble art of fencing is not learned to murder or kill your neighbor, it is necessary to know how to preserve your own honour, your welfare, yes, also your life and limbs, in a subtle and honest manner if you should unexpectedly be assaulted. Thus, I have decided to demonstrate hereby in a simple manner some lessons that, by me, are called 1) the gallantry-thrusts, 2) the snap-cuts, 3) spadroning and the four cross-cuts.

See Jonas Thomsen von Wintzleben, *The Noble Art of Fencing condensed, or Instruction in Thrust and Cut*, Copenhagen: T. L. Bourpe, 1756, translated by Reinier van Noort in *Scandinavian Smallsword*, LuLu Press, 2017; the Danish is from a pdf of the text, *Den adelige Fegte-kunst i et kort Begreb: eller Underviisning i Stød og Hug, ziret med behørige Figurer*, Kiøbenhavn: T.L. Borup, 1756, Ch. III, p. 151, the Royal Danish Library, <http://www.kb.dk/e-mat/doc/130020341662.pdf>.

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*Qui cominza zogho di spada a doii man zogho largo. Questo magistro ch'e qui incrosado cum questo zugadore in punta de spada, dise quando io son incrosado in punta de spada, subito io do volta ala mia spada e si lo fiero dal'altra parte cum lo fendente zo per la testa e per gli brazzi, overo che gli metto una punta in lo volto, come vederi qui dredo depinto.*  
[Ms Ludwig XV 13, Getty, 25r-c]

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## READING – IMAGE AND TEXT



*Qui cominza zogho di spada a doii man zogho largo. Questo magistro ch'e qui incrosado cum questo zugadore in punta de spada, dise quando io son incrosado in punta de spada, subito io do volta ala mia spada e si lo fiero dal'altra parte cum lo fendente zo per la testa e per gli brazzi, overo che gli metto una punta in lo volto, come vederi qui dredo depinto.*  
[Ms Ludwig XV 13, Getty, 25r-c]

### First Master of Longsword Plays (*largo*)

Here begins the *Gioco Largo* (wide plays) of the sword in two hands.

This Master who is crossed at the point of his sword with this player says:

“When I am crossed at the points, I quickly switch my sword to the other side, and strike him from that side with a downward blow to his head or arms. Alternatively, I can place a thrust into his face, as the next picture will show.



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# INTERPRETATION

- Transcription [converting script to modern conventions]
- Translation [of the text]
- Translation [of the images]
- Interpretation\*

★ ALL (okay, almost all) INTERPRETATION IS TENTATIVE

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## WHY?

Our interpretations are tentative because:

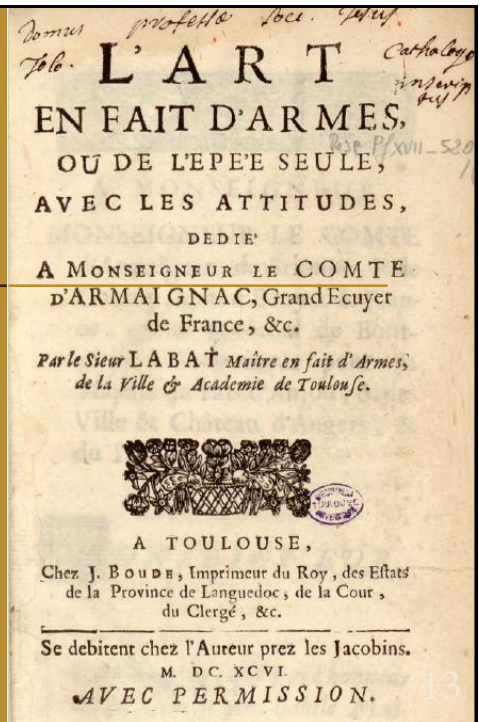
- ❖ we rarely have all the facts
  - ❖ we rarely have full explanations
  - ❖ our context is different
- ❖ *interpretations are only as good as the available evidence AND the best case one can make from it*



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# SOURCES & TEACHING

- Analysis
- Interpretation of text
- Interpretation for modern students
- Implementation
  - Individual lesson
  - class

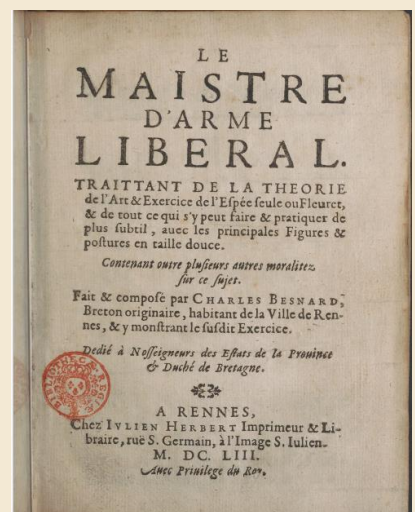


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# LE MAITRE D'ARMES LIBERAL

Charles Besnard

- ❖ Important Early French Work
- ❖ Possibly a “transitional” text
- ❖ Systematic, well-organized, and effective
- ❖ A lot of cultural import
  - ❖ anti-dueling stance
    - ❖ pistol and knife
  - ❖ robs France of fighting men
  - ❖ morality & teaching the art of arms



1653

14

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## KEY QUESTIONS



- What do I find of value in the text?
- What is different from what we've studied up to now?
- How do I think it will inform or aid my students?
- What do they *need* to know?
- What will they *want* to know?

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## START WITH THE BASICS

### An Uncomfortable Truth

Much of what intrigues an instructor may not matter at all to most students:

Most students do not want

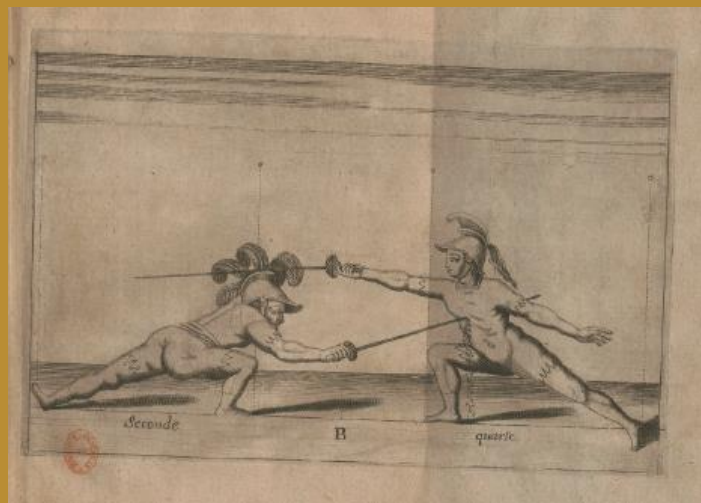
- a history lesson
- to know details of the manuscript's provenance, recensions, etc.

SO, start with the



### BASICS

- Initial position (*en garde* position)
- Movement
- Primary guards/invitations\*
- Primary parries
- Primary attacks

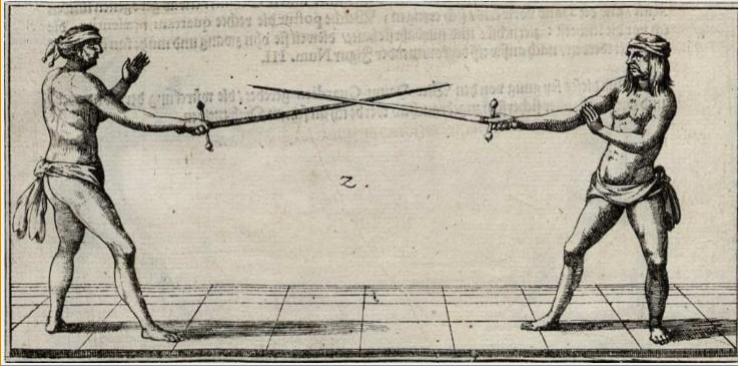


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# WHAT THEY NEED TO KNOW



Jéann Daniel L'Ange, *Deutliche und gründliche Erklärung der Adelichen und Ritterlichen freyen Fecht-Kunst (Clear and Thorough Explanation of the Noble, Chivalric, and Free Art of Fencing)*, 1664

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# CONSIDERATIONS IN INTERPRETATION

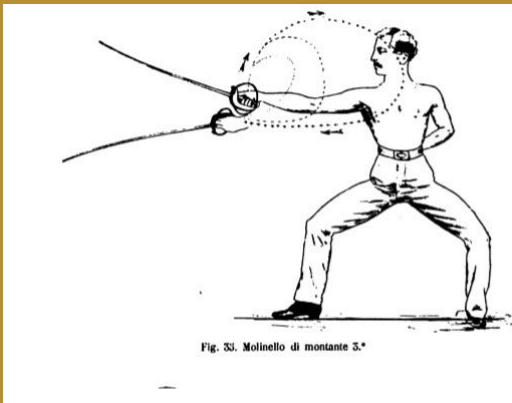


Fig. 33. Molinello di montante 3.\*

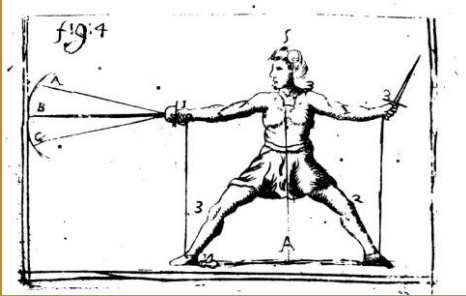
Rossi, *Manuale Teorico-Practico per la Scherma di Spada e Sciabola*, 1885

- Accuracy
  - what is source
  - what is more *my* take on that source
- Safety
- Pace of Introduction

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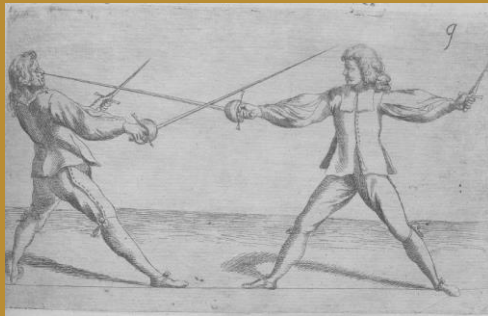
### CONSIDERATIONS IN INTERPRETATION, CONT.



Marcelli, 1686



Villardita, 1670

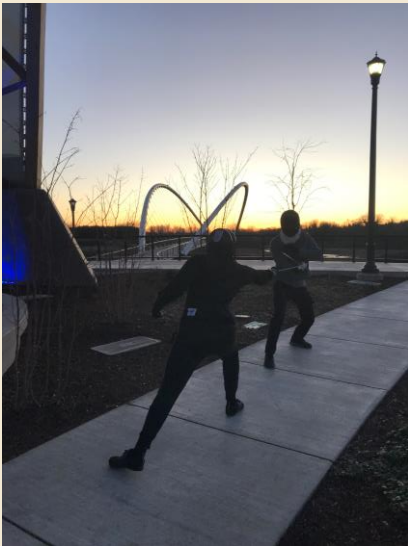


Pallavicini, 1673

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### FROM PAGE TO PRACTICE



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## Some Basic Guidelines

- **Read, read, read, and read again**
- **Rely on previous *well-conducted* work**
  - there is no shame in standing on the shoulders of giants
- **Be open to correction, new information, or better interpretations**
  - what distinguishes good research for poor research?
  - be wary of anyone who believes they have it all figured out: they don't
- **Consider what students need vs. what is flashy or showy**
  - too much emphasis on exceptional actions, not enough on basic, fundamental actions
  - crawl before walk/pants before shoes
- **Use the tools that help most**
  - solid grasp of **universal principles**
  - firm understanding of basic technique as handed down
    - easier to work backward than guess or invent
    - established vocabulary helps us interpret AND share our interpretations

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## UNIVERSALS (ONE VIEW)

- ❖ distance/measure
- ❖ tempo
- ❖ judgement
- ❖ speed
- ❖ initiative
- ❖ tradecraft

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